

# Pieter Molijn

1595–1661

PIETER MOLIJN, born in London of Flemish parents, was baptized on 6 April 1595. He became a master of the Haarlem guild of painters in 1616. It is not known when he left England or where and with whom he studied painting. There is no evidence to support the tradition that he was a pupil of Frans Hals (q.v.), although it is quite likely that he received his instruction in Haarlem.

In 1624 Molijn joined a Haarlem civic guard company, and from 1630 to 1649 he was also a prominent figure in the administration of the guild. He held office as either *boofdman* or *deken* in 1630, 1633, 1637, 1638, 1645, and 1649. Little else is known of his professional career, except that he seems to have remained in Haarlem until his death in 1661. His pupils included the genre painter Gerard ter Borch (q.v.) and probably also the landscapist Allart van Everdingen (1621–1675).

During the course of Molijn's long career, Dutch landscape painting underwent rapid and dramatic changes. Until 1625 his work was inspired by the mannerist, Flemish tradition of landscape painting practiced in the Netherlands by artists such as Roelandt Savery (q.v.). Perhaps through the inspiration of his fellow Haarlem painter Esaias van de Velde (1587–1630), however, Molijn helped forge the way for a new mode of landscape during the latter half of the 1620s with compositions unified by a sweeping diagonal. These small landscape views, executed with a limited palette, anticipate the tonal style that Jan van Goyen (q.v.) and Salomon van Ruysdael (1600/1603–1670) refined during the late 1630s and 1640s. Molijn was also a talented draftsman and graphic artist.

## Bibliography

- Schrevelius 1648: 389–390.  
Houbraken 1753, 3: 183–184.  
Van der Willigen 1870: 18, 21, 27, 225–227, 229.  
Granberg 1883.  
Granberg 1884b.  
Stechow 1966: 23–28.  
Amsterdam 1987: 374–376.  
Allen 1987.

1986.10.1

## *Landscape with Open Gate*

c. 1630

Oil on oak, 33.6 x 47.9 (13<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> x 18<sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub>)

Ailsa Mellon Bruce Fund and Gift of Arthur K. and Susan H. Wheelock

**Technical Notes:** The support, a single, horizontally grained oak board, has several minor cracks parallel to the grain. Dendrochronology has determined a felling date between 1628 and 1634, with the most plausible date being 1630.<sup>1</sup> The back is wax-coated and the edges beveled. The double ground consists of a lower white layer and an upper light brown layer. The smooth, thin ground masks the wood grain and is extensively incorporated into the design. The fluid, brush-applied strokes of the extensive underdrawing, which is more agitated and oblique than the final composition, are readily visible to the naked eye as well as with infrared reflectography. The two small foreground figures, which do not appear in the underdrawing, seem to be later additions.

Translucent paint is applied thinly and rapidly, with slightly impasted highlights and stiff brushwork in the sky. Frequently the ground is merely glazed over lightly or highlights applied to exposed underdrawing lines, as in a quickly executed sketch. Discolored retouching covers scattered small losses and reinforces lines in the gate and the figures to its right. Remnants of aged varnishes indicate past selective cleaning.

**Provenance:** Private collection, France; Arthur K. and Susan H. Wheelock, Washington, in 1980.

**Exhibited:** *Haarlem: The Seventeenth Century*, Jane Voorhees Zimmerli Art Museum, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, New Jersey, 1983, no. 85 (as "Attributed to").

THIS SMALL WORK, so evocative of the windswept terrain near the dunes along the Dutch coast, captures the essence of early seventeenth-century landscape painting. With free and fluid strokes, Molijn has created a vigorous and animated scene, where sea breezes, which have so molded the craggy form of the dead, vine-covered oak and the wood slats of the gate and fence, rustle the leaves of trees surrounding the farm. The painting does not have a composed feeling, but appears as though it were a view suddenly happened upon along a sandy road. From the low vantage point, nature rather than man takes precedence. The road, gate, and craggy tree are boldly depicted, while the only figures Molijn included, a shepherd returning with his sheep just



Pieter Molijn, *Landscape with Open Gate*, 1986.10.1



Fig. 1. Pieter Molijn, *Road Between Trees near a Farm*, 1626, pen and ink on blue paper, Amsterdam, Rijksprentenkabinet

over the rise and a man behind the fence, are small and insignificant.<sup>2</sup>

*Landscape with Open Gate* is not signed, but the attribution to Pieter Molijn is without doubt. Comparisons with his painting *Dune Landscape with Trees and Wagon*, signed and dated 1626 (Herzog Anton Ulrich-Museum, Braunschweig, inv. no. 338), and with his signed pen drawing of the late 1620s, *Road between Trees near a Farm* (fig. 1), demonstrate the same approach to landscape.<sup>3</sup> In each instance, this Haarlem artist has dramatically broken with pictorial tradition and situated the viewer below the horizon. With vistas limited by low viewpoints, the roads that pass through the rolling, windswept landscapes have no beginning and no end. Only the small, insubstantial figures traveling just behind the crests of the rises suggest the world beyond. Stylistically, a particularly interesting comparison can be

made between the vigorous rhythms of the pen lines in the drawing and the black chalk underdrawing in *Landscape with Open Gate*, which is visible with infrared reflectography (fig. 2).

When Molijn created these works in the late 1620s he was one of the most adventurous landscape artists of his day, one who conveyed an unprecedented sense of realism to his scenes. Not only did he limit his range of motifs and color tonalities, he also organized his compositions with powerful diagonal accents that were reinforced through strong effects of light and dark. Through these means he gave his paintings both a specific visual focus and a unifying path into the distance. By 1626 his bold and vigorous brushwork had already attracted the attention of Frans Hals for whom he painted the landscape in the celebrated portrait *Isaac Abrahamsz. Massa* (Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto).<sup>4</sup> As early as 1628 Samuel Ampzing praised Molijn for these same qualities in his chronicle of Haarlem.<sup>5</sup> At about the same time, Molijn's influence in both style and subject matter is evident in the work of his Haarlem contemporary Salomon van Ruysdael and in paintings by the Leiden artist Jan van Goyen.

Molijn's distinctive style of landscape painting owed much to the drawings and etchings of three artists who already had been active in Haarlem at the time he joined the Saint Luke's Guild in 1616: Esaias van de Velde (1587–1630), Willem Buytewech (c. 1591–1624), and Jan van de Velde II (1593–1641). However, the restive character of his line indicates that he also drew inspiration from other artists, including Jacob de Gheyn II (1565–1629) and Abraham Bloemaert (1564–1651), whose landscape drawings often focused on old barns and rugged trees.<sup>6</sup> While Molijn's historical importance was his ability to translate these precedents into painted images,

Fig. 2. Infrared reflectogram of 1986.10.1





Fig. 3. Roemer Visscher, "Keur baert angst," emblem from *Sinnepoppen*, Amsterdam, 1614

ones that helped usher in the tonal phase of Dutch landscape painting, it may also be that he translated thematic concepts as well. Dilapidated farms and starkly silhouetted dead trees would have been understood in moralizing terms by some of his contemporaries.<sup>7</sup> The dead tree in *Landscape with Open Gate* may have called to mind Roemer Visscher's emblem "Keur baert angst" [Choosing causes anxiety] (fig. 3), which juxtaposes a rotten and a healthy tree to stress that false appearances and lack of knowledge often lead one to make wrong choices in life.<sup>8</sup> This

## Aert van der Neer

1603/1604–1677

AERT [AERNOUT]. VAN DER NEER was probably born in Amsterdam. Documents from later in his life indicate that he was born in 1603 or 1604; the names of his parents are not known. He spent his youth near Gorinchem in the south of the Netherlands, where he most likely trained with the landscape painter Raphael Govertsz. Camphuysen (c. 1597/1598–1657). By 1632 Van der Neer was living in Amsterdam where he had moved shortly after his marriage to Lysbeth Goverts. The couple's children were all born in Amsterdam. One son, Eglon van der Neer (1634–1703), became a painter.

Because Aert van der Neer did not receive high

tree could also have been seen as a reminder of the transitoriness of life, an idea taken up with even greater force somewhat later in Haarlem by Jacob van Ruisdael (q.v.) (see 1942.9.80).

### Notes

1. Dendrochronology by Dr. Peter Klein, Universität Hamburg, 7 January 1987.
2. Two small, out-of-scale figures before the fence have been added by a later hand; they are in the shadows so they do not detract very much from the overall impact of the painting.
3. For a discussion of this drawing, see Schapelhouman and Schatborn 1987, 26, where a date from "the second half of the twenties" is postulated.
4. Slive 1970–1974, 3: 25–26, cat. 42, where the attribution of the landscape to Molijn is first made.
5. Ampzing 1628, 372: "...En van het stout pinzeel en hand'ling van Molijn, die in de schilder-konst twee dapp're meesters zijn." That Molijn would have been so well regarded by 1628 is surprising for no paintings are dated before 1625. For an assessment of Molijn's artistic evolution see Allen 1987.
6. See, for example, Bloemaert's drawing *A Shepherd with Sheep near a Dead Tree* (Rijksprentenkabinet, Amsterdam, inv. no. 11898 A 3740) illustrated in Schapelhouman and Schatborn 1987, 3.
7. For a rather controversial assessment of the moralizing character of Dutch landscapes see Josua Bruyn, "Toward a Scriptural Reading of Seventeenth-Century Dutch Landscape Paintings," in Amsterdam 1987, 84–92.
8. Roemer Visscher, *Sinnepoppen* (Amsterdam, 1614), 11, as discussed by Peter Sutton in Amsterdam 1987, 15.

### References

- 1983 New Brunswick: no. 85.  
1987 Allen: 133, fig. 145.

prices for his pictures, in 1659 he was forced to supplement his income as the proprietor of an Amsterdam tavern, "de Graeff van Hollant." His career as a *wyntapper* failed three years later, and on 12 December 1662 he declared bankruptcy. The inventory of his possessions made at the time indicates the low prices his paintings fetched; most were appraised at five guilders or less. He lived in impoverished conditions during the last years of his life and died in Amsterdam on 9 November 1677.

Van der Neer's earliest known painting, dated 1632 (Národní Galerie, Prague), is a genre scene, a type of subject he did not depict again. During the